

# Whither the 2d Cavalry?

by Lieutenant Colonel Kevin C.M. Benson

The Armored Gun System is gone. The senior Army leadership decided it was an important but not vital program. The cold reality of money, or lack of it, couldn't be ignored. Regardless of the Army's size, our current National Military Strategy remains based upon power projection of forces from the continental United States to areas of vital national interest. Strategic mobility by both air and sea is therefore very critical.

The Army and the Department of Defense will thus require units which can operate relatively independently at a reduced cost, and without major reinforcement along the operational continuum. Recent operations in Haiti and the ongoing operation in Bosnia highlight this need. Based upon all of this, where does the 2d Armored Cavalry Regiment need to go in terms of its TO&E? With the demise of the AGS, what form should the 2d ACR take that both meets the needs of the regional CINCs and is affordable?

The hallmark of Army operations is operations in depth across the land force battlespace. The requirement to expand thinking to develop a vision that both dominates the enemy and protects the force across that battlespace demands constant reconnaissance, and that demands cavalry. The 2d ACR's combination of capabilities — three ground cavalry squadrons that can put 180 scout teams on the ground and an air cavalry squadron that can extend the vision of the battlefield to the limit of the OH-58D's FLIR range — is unbeatable and unmatched by any other unit in the Army.

On the other end of the operational continuum is the growing mission of Operations Other Than War (OOTW). It is axiomatic that the toughest mission facing any unit is combat. The military exists to fight the nation's wars. Since war is an extension of policy by other means, so too these operations are an extension of policy through other means. From January 1995 to the completion of the UN mission in February 1996, the 2d ACR implemented national policy by placing disciplined, trained troopers on the streets of Port-au-Prince, maintaining a secure and stable environment.



The thrust of this essay is to discuss some thoughts on the organization of the regiment and then propose a hybrid organization which, I believe, will meet the Army's needs.

The 2d ACR, in its current form — all wheeled with no cannon-equipped, tank-killing systems — can perform peace operations and fulfill the XVIII Airborne Corps' reconnaissance requirements. In accord with the mission essential task list, the regiment cannot perform guard or cover missions against heavy forces without significant reinforcements.

The 2d ACR is a proven, deployable force. The regiment also proved it can incorporate light infantry reinforcements, such as the two light/airborne rifle companies attached to regimental squadrons during the Haiti mission. The regiment, as an existing combined arms team, has no problem adding to the team.

The notion of adding light infantry as a permanent part of the regimental MTOE was a favorite at the Joint Readiness Training Center. Adding light infantry as a permanent part of the regiment will detract from, not add to, the regiment's flexibility. It is not a bad idea to reinforce the regiment with light infantry when the situation calls for this type of reinforcement, such as occurred during the Haiti mission. The

need for a dismount element exists, but the addition of infantry without a means to transport the riflemen does not address the dismount need. (The addition of infantry to a cavalry regiment has some historical basis. The Cavalry Reorganization Board of 1946 recommended the addition of a "Dragoon Troop" to the then-current cavalry TO&E. This troop was mounted in half-tracks and intended for town-clearing, obstacle reduction, and dismounted overwatch missions. This was an addition to a heavier cavalry organization. The means to transport the infantry was provided by the half-tracks.)

Other proposals for the future of the regiment range from a mix of squadrons of long range recon, light cavalry, and heavy cavalry, to the most familiar — a return to the heavy cavalry we all grew to love from the days of the inter-German border. None of these proposals makes sense in light of ongoing and future Army missions. A mix of long-range recon, light, and heavy would amount to a bastard organization which could not fight as a regiment. The heavy cavalry is oriented on the two major regional contingencies we may face, but what else can it do? The solution, in this cavalryman's mind, is a hybrid.

I believe that the most affordable future organization of the 2d ACR, in

terms of both money and equipment, is the replacement of the TOW-equipped HMMWVs in the antitank troops, and the M198s in the howitzer battery with M1A1s and M109A6s, respectively. The squadrons of the 2d Cavalry will then be organized with three cavalry troops, a tank company, an SP howitzer battery, and the HHT. The Regimental Support Squadron (RSS) would also receive M88 recovery vehicles and turret and hull maintenance personnel.

The regiment's current and future home of Fort Polk and the JRTC make this organization viable in terms of training. By FORSCOM regulation, the regiment must provide a squadron per JRTC training rotation as OPFOR augmentation. 2d ACR must also fit its unit training in between the training unit rotations at the JRTC; this means during weekends and clean-up time at the end of a rotation, as well as holidays. The training of three tank companies and three howitzer batteries is infinitely more manageable than coordinating the gunnery of an entire heavy regiment. For the foreseeable future, Fort Polk's primary reason for being will be the JRTC. The Multi-Purpose Range Complex at Fort Polk can easily handle the gunnery requirements of a few companies of armor. The tank companies can also fit into the BLUE FOR training rotations as augmenting forces. This step would save transportation dollars for CONUS units.

The addition of tanks and self-propelled artillery will require the replacement of some wheel mechanics by hull and turret maintenance personnel in the squadron HHTs and the RSS. The support platoons will need to exchange some 5-ton trucks for fuel and cargo HEMMTs. The RSS Supply & Transport troop will also require PLS. The RSS Maintenance Troop will also require the addition of M88s and turret and hull mechanics. The regiment's ASL will need to reflect the addition of tanks and SP artillery. All of these additions to RSS will somewhat affect the tactical mobility of the unit, but not materially affect the strategic mobility.

The modifications to the 2d ACR's MTOE, as stated above, allow the regiment to retain an element of strategic mobility via air while increasing the lethality of the regiment to perform the cover and guard missions outlined in FM 17-95, *Cavalry Operations*. It will strain, somewhat, the RSS, but no more than the current level of support required by the regiment across a broad

front. The Army also retains a unit which can operate, without major reinforcement, across the entire continuum of conflict.

Let us theorize a regional contingency in a desert environment. Corps-sized counterattacks and ripostes leave open flanks. The 2d Cavalry can guard these flanks with its armored HMMWVs, tanks, self-propelled artillery, and OH-58Ds. The cavalry troops equipped with armored HMMWVs can range across the flank in screening observation posts or a moving screen. The air and ground scouts can put eyes on target, confirming or denying information the corps receives from airborne sensors. The scouts can also provide terminal guidance for precision munitions delivered by either the corps artillery, corps Apache battalions, or Air Force aircraft. The addition of the SP artillery ensures the regiment has agile artillery which can maneuver and then mass fires at the decisive point. There is also commonality between the howitzer batteries of the regiment and any reinforcing field artillery. The tank companies provide the squadron commanders an effective means to strip away enemy reconnaissance and force the deployment of enemy forces, all the while buying time for the corps commander to respond to a threat to his flank, the traditional role of cavalry.

A peacekeeping or enforcement commitment is also within the range of missions for the 2d Cavalry. The regiment does not now and will not put exclusive peacekeeping missions on its METL. The 2d ACR found that the discipline required for combat makes it easier to transition to the tasks and discipline required in OOTW. In short, albeit intense, training periods, the regiment can train to standard and then deploy on these missions, as it proved in Haiti. In the regiment's experience, PEO and PKO missions require the presence of overwhelming firepower, or the potential to mass such force as needed. Potential bad actors need to know the PEO/PKO force can crush them, if required. A regiment armed as proposed can accomplish this mission. The armored HMMWVs can effectively patrol city streets or country trails with the tanks and air cavalry providing the ultimate in quick reaction forces. The artillery provides an unmistakable touch of menace, the steel hand inside the velvet glove of the PEO/PKO force. The best way to keep the peace on these missions is to ensure all potential bad actors know the cost of

breaking the peace or attacking the enforcers.

The Army will continue to downsize. The units the Army retains must be able to respond to missions across the operational continuum. These units must be able to deploy by air and land or use the prepositioned afloat stocks available. The primary warfighting focus — our two potential major regional contingencies — require forces which can contribute to the fight. The 2d ACR can conceivably be called on to fight in either region. The hybrid organization I propose can significantly contribute to the fight in either prospective theater and make use of the full range of strategic deployment, including prepositioned stocks. It can also, and just as importantly, effectively and efficiently train at the regiment's current home station.

Corps commanders, Army commanders, and CINCs all require information obtained by reconnaissance units. The 2d Cavalry with M1114 armored HMMWVs, M1A1s, M109A6s, and OH-58Ds can fulfill this requirement. The regiment will also have the wherewithal to fight for information through terminal guidance of precision munitions, agile artillery fires, or the killing punch of the best tank in the world. The Army and the Armor School have the time now to evaluate this proposal quickly and then make a fielding decision which will retain a strategically mobile, operationally useful, and tactically lethal force.

That is one cavalrman's opinion.

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